# Neural Signal and Neural Noise in Primary Auditory Cortex

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# Introduction

- Information is represented in neurons by sequences of action potentials (spikes).
- The response of a neuron to a given stimulus exhibits variability.
- Standard model: an underlying time-varying *probability function* governs the firing of spikes, usually modeled as a non-stationary point process.
- We measure the response of cell to broadband sounds and derived Spectro-Temporal Receptive Fields (STRF), a linear, quantitative descriptor of how a cell responds to dynamic sounds.
- When predicting responses to a new sound, there is a difference between the response predicted by the STRF and the actual response. How much difference is due to non-linearity, and how much is expected from neural variability, such as a Poisson processes?

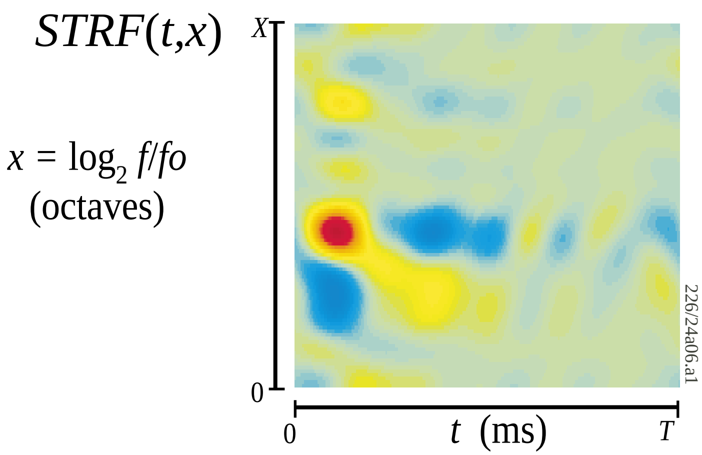
# Summary

- We previously modeled cells in Primary Auditory Cortex (AI) of ferrets as responding linearly to the low-passed envelope of incoming sounds.
- We model the response of a cell by a linear convolution between an STRF and the envelope of the sound.
- There is typically a difference between the predicted response and the actual response. How much can be attributed to intrinsic variability in the neural firings, and how much to non-linear effects?
- We conclude that most of the difference is attributable to the intrinsic variability (“noise”) of the neurons, as manifested by the (non-homogeneous) Poisson statistics of the firings

# STRFs in AI

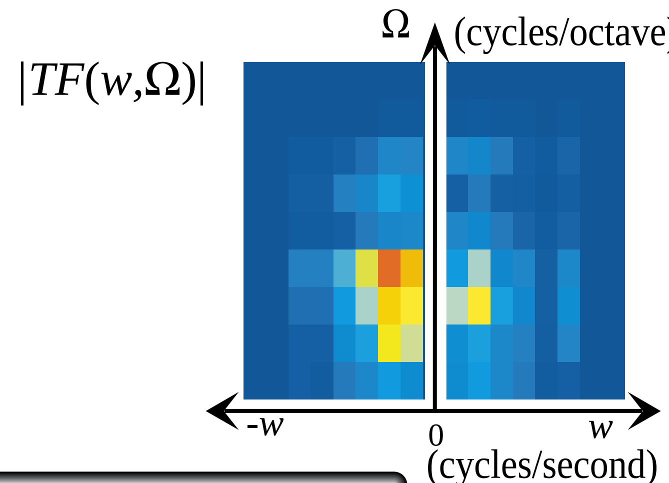
Cells are characterized their Spectro-Temporal Response Field (STRF)...

... or by the (Fourier domain) ripple transfer function (TF).

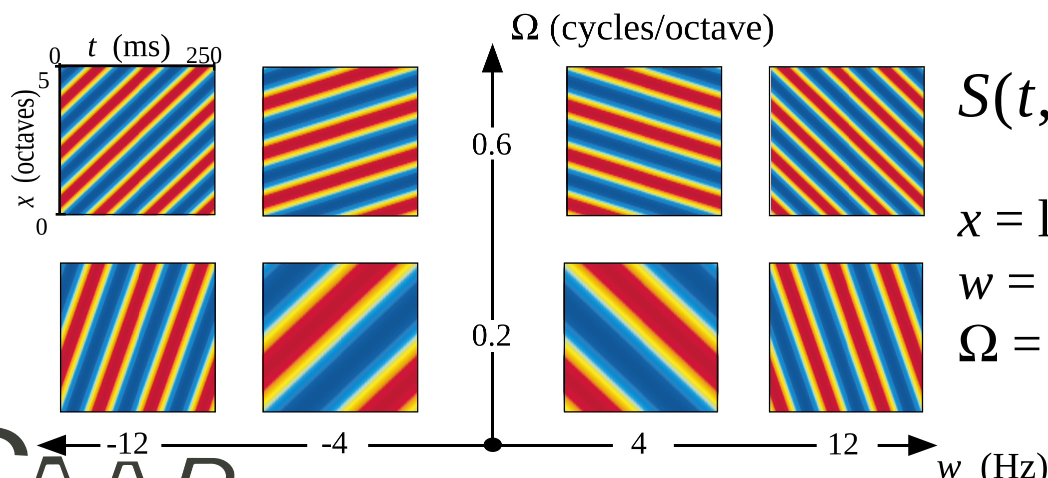



$|\mathcal{F}\{\ \}|$

$\longleftrightarrow$




**Moving ripples** form the basis for the Fourier domain description of dynamic spectra. At time ***t*** and frequency ***x***, the amplitude ***S(t,x)*** is given by:

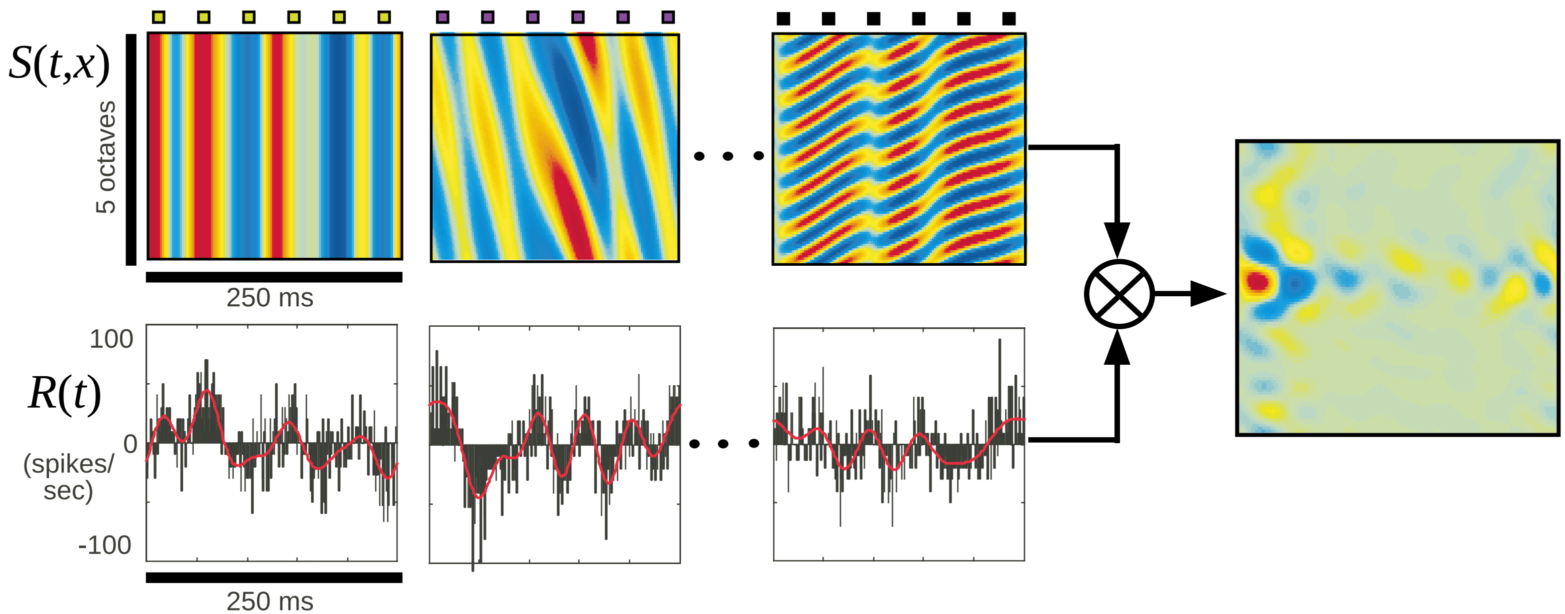



$$S(t,x) = \sin(2\pi wt + 2\pi\Omega x + \Phi)$$

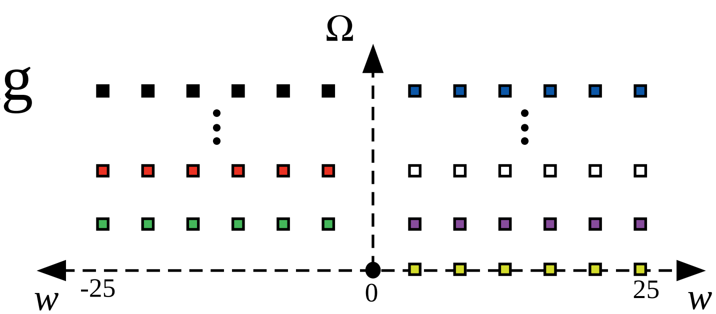
$x = \log_2[f / f_0]$
$w$ = ripple velocity, modulation rate
$\Omega$ = ripple frequency, spectral density

# Temporally Orthogonal Ripple Combinations

- STRF measured by reverse-correlating with dynamic spectrum of a broad-band stimulus.
- Temporally Orthogonal Ripple Combinations composed of ripples with different modulation rates.
- Allow clean STRF estimates in relatively short time.




The stimuli shown contain ripples covering the same range of ripple velocities, but at different ripple frequencies.





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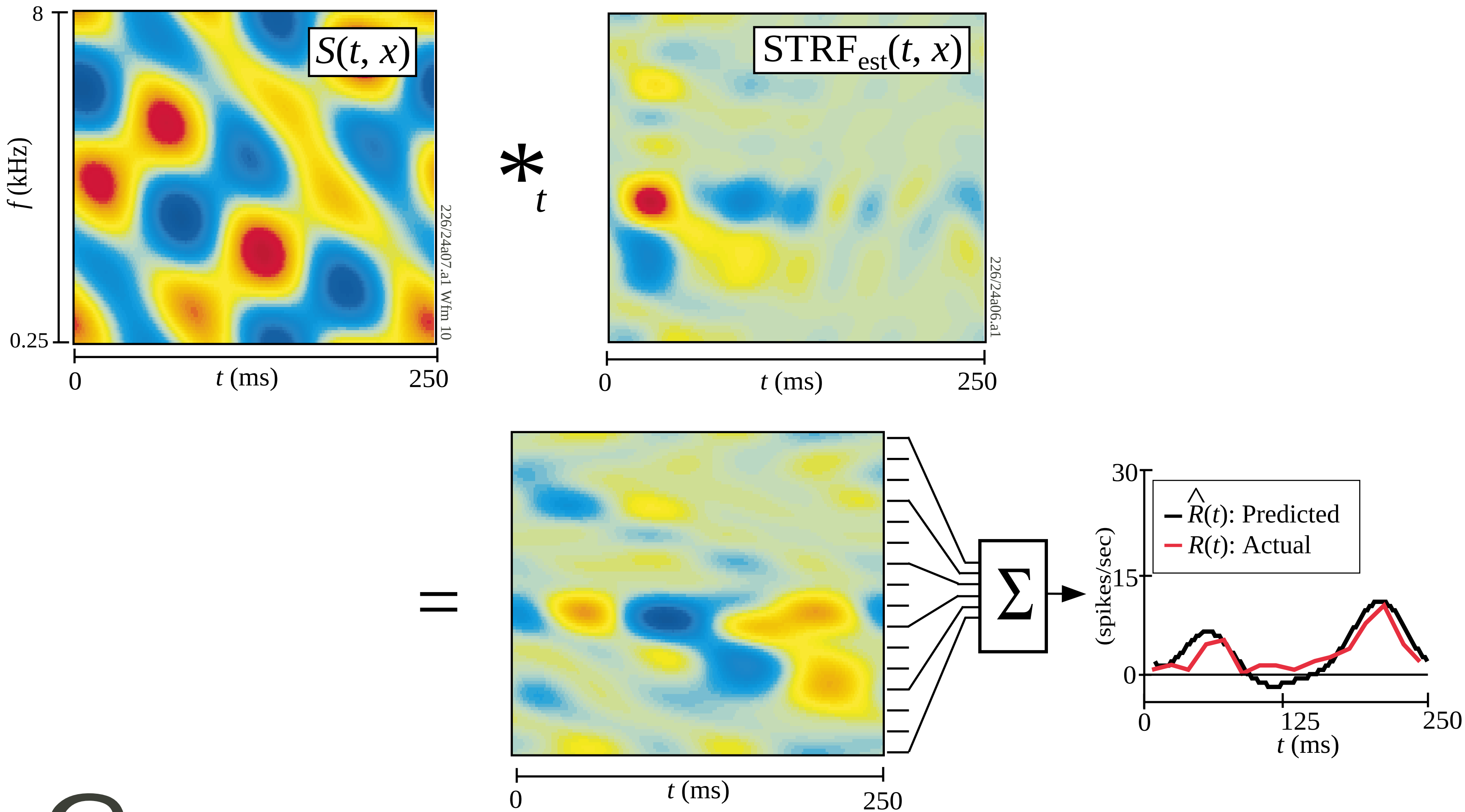
# Predicting Responses from STRF

The response to an arbitrary sound is predicted by the convolution of the STRF with the stimulus' spectro-temporal envelope (plus a constant).

$$\hat{R}(t) = \frac{1}{X}\sum_{x}\{\mathrm{STRF}_{est}(t,x) *_t S(t,x)\} + \mathrm{E}\{R(t)\}$$

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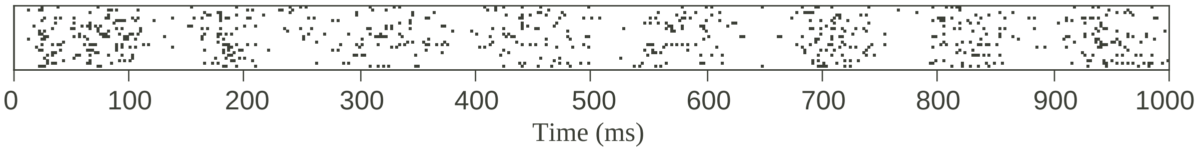
# Bootstrap Technique

- From presentation to presentation, there is **variability** or “noise”.
- We use **resamples** of data to estimate variability.
- Resamples are of same size as original samples: *N* samples of bootstrap data are drawn *with replacement* from the *N* original samples.
- Repeat procedure many times to create a population of bootstrap resamples whose probability distribution is a good estimator of the probability distribution from which the original data was drawn.
- Mean, variance, and higher order moments of bootstrap population are good, unbiased, estimators of those same moments of the true distribution.
- Related to “Jackknife” technique.

# Bootstrap Example

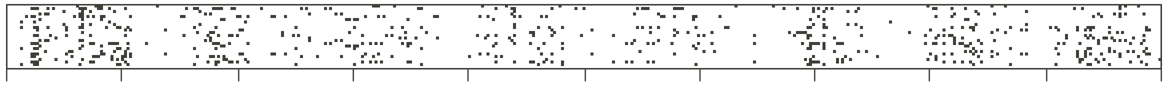
## Raster Data 30 sweeps




Mean firing rate: 25.0 spikes/s
Percentage ISI = 40 ms: 0.23%

14 5 1 4 17 29 25 6 14 7 23 1 2 13 30 5 27 25 22 14 20 28 7 21 29 2 20 24 9 16

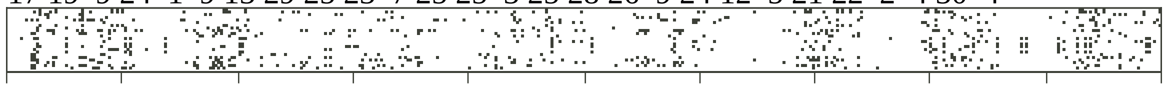
Resample 1



23.1 spikes/s
0.40%

17 19 9 24 1 9 13 29 25 23 7 25 25 3 25 28 26 9 24 12 5 21 22 2 4 30 4

Resample 2

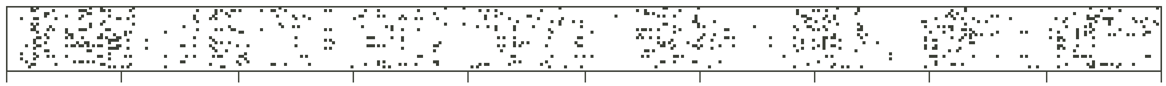


25.4 spikes/s
0.09%

⋮

10 13 29 21 28 25 24 28 8 23 21 15 11 23 15 22 6 25 22 9 30 18 3 14 13 19 8 9 29 18

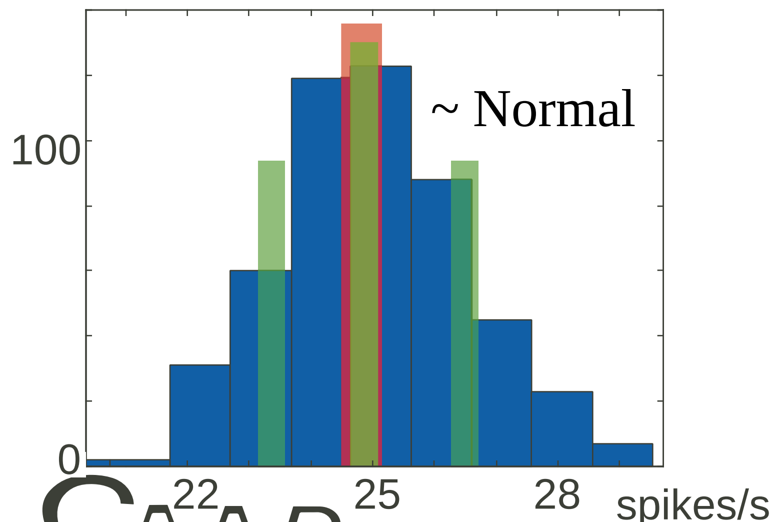
Resample *N*

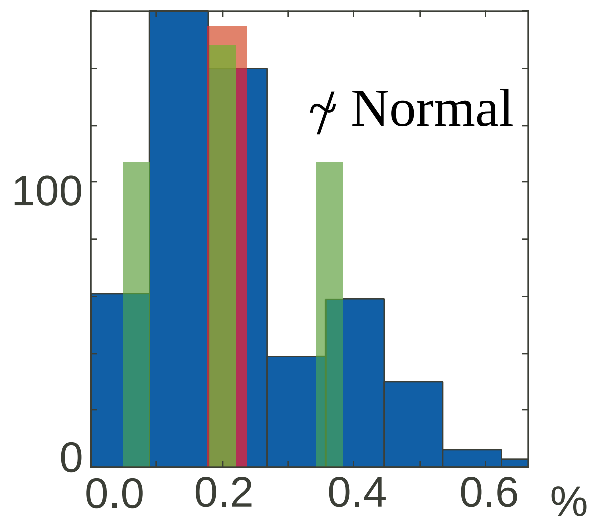


23.6 spikes/s
0.23%

226/20a04.m2-spk 8 Hz, -0.4 cyc/oct, 65 dB

## Bootstrap distributions




Best Estimate

Bootstrap mean and standard deviations

*N* = 500

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# Poisson Statistics

- The measured observable is the spike train, which we model as a Poisson random variable.
- Assume underlying, deterministic, probability density for firing, $\boldsymbol{r(t)}$
- # of measurements (stimulus presentations) = $\boldsymbol{n}$
- probability of measuring $N$ spikes between $t$ and $\Delta t$: $\boldsymbol{p(N(t;\Delta t)) = r(t)\,\Delta t}$
- Expectation values for mean, $\eta$, and variance, $\sigma$, of $N$:

$$\eta_N(t;\Delta t) := E\{N(t;\Delta t)\} = n\,r(t)\,\Delta t$$

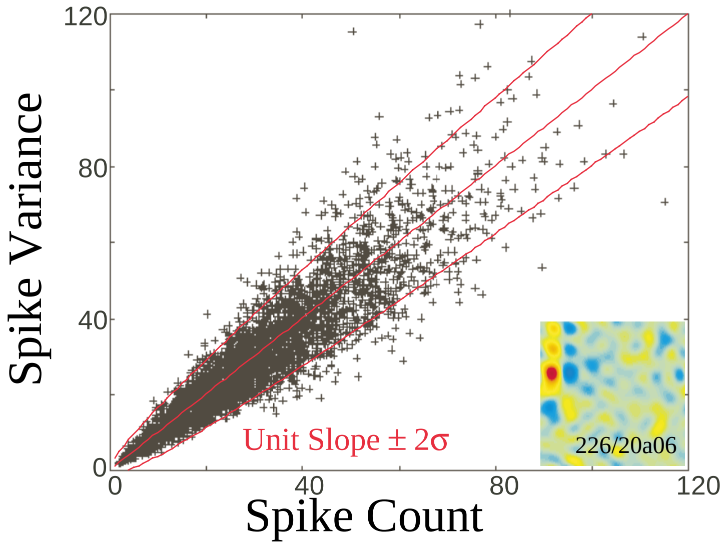
$$\sigma_N^2(t;\Delta t) := E\{(N[t;\Delta t)]^2\} - [\eta_N(t;\Delta t)]^2 = \eta_N(t;\Delta t) = n\,r(t)\,\Delta t$$

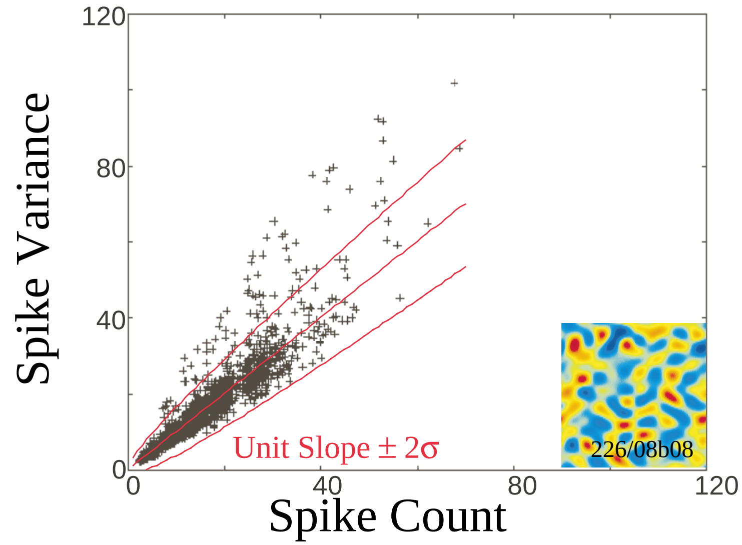
- Thus a prediction for the Fano factor:

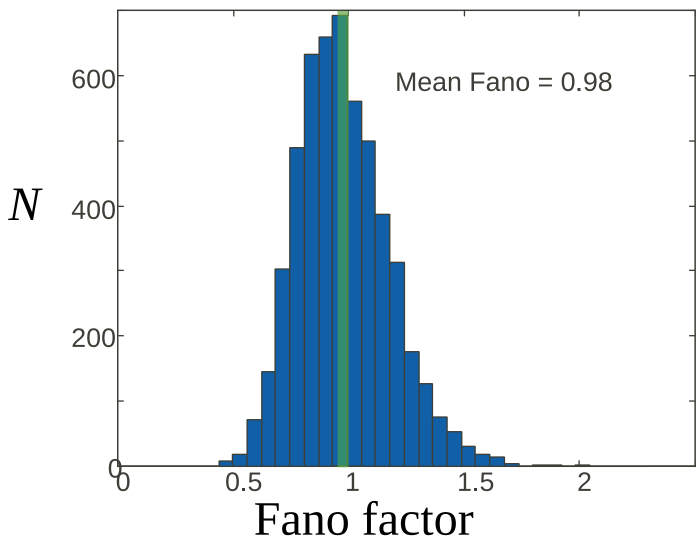
$$\phi_N(t;\Delta t) := \eta_N(t;\Delta t)/\sigma_N^2(t;\Delta t) = 1$$

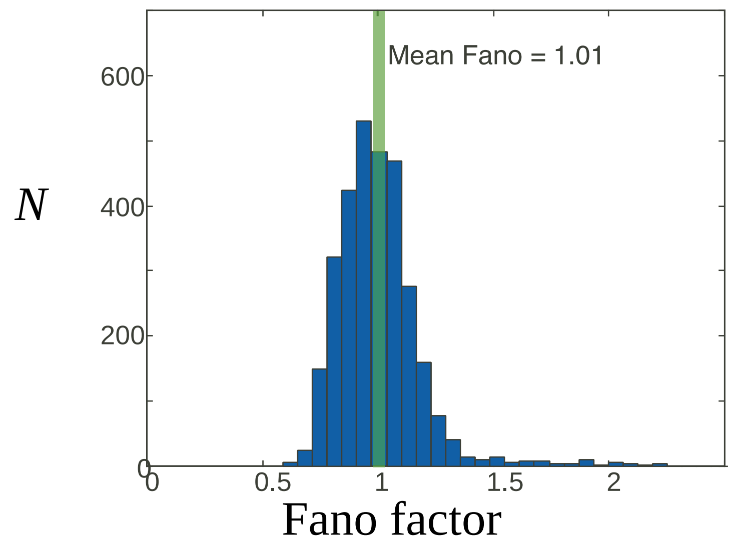
# Poisson Variance Examples

- Examples of the computation of the Fano factor for two cells, one “clean” and the other very noisy.

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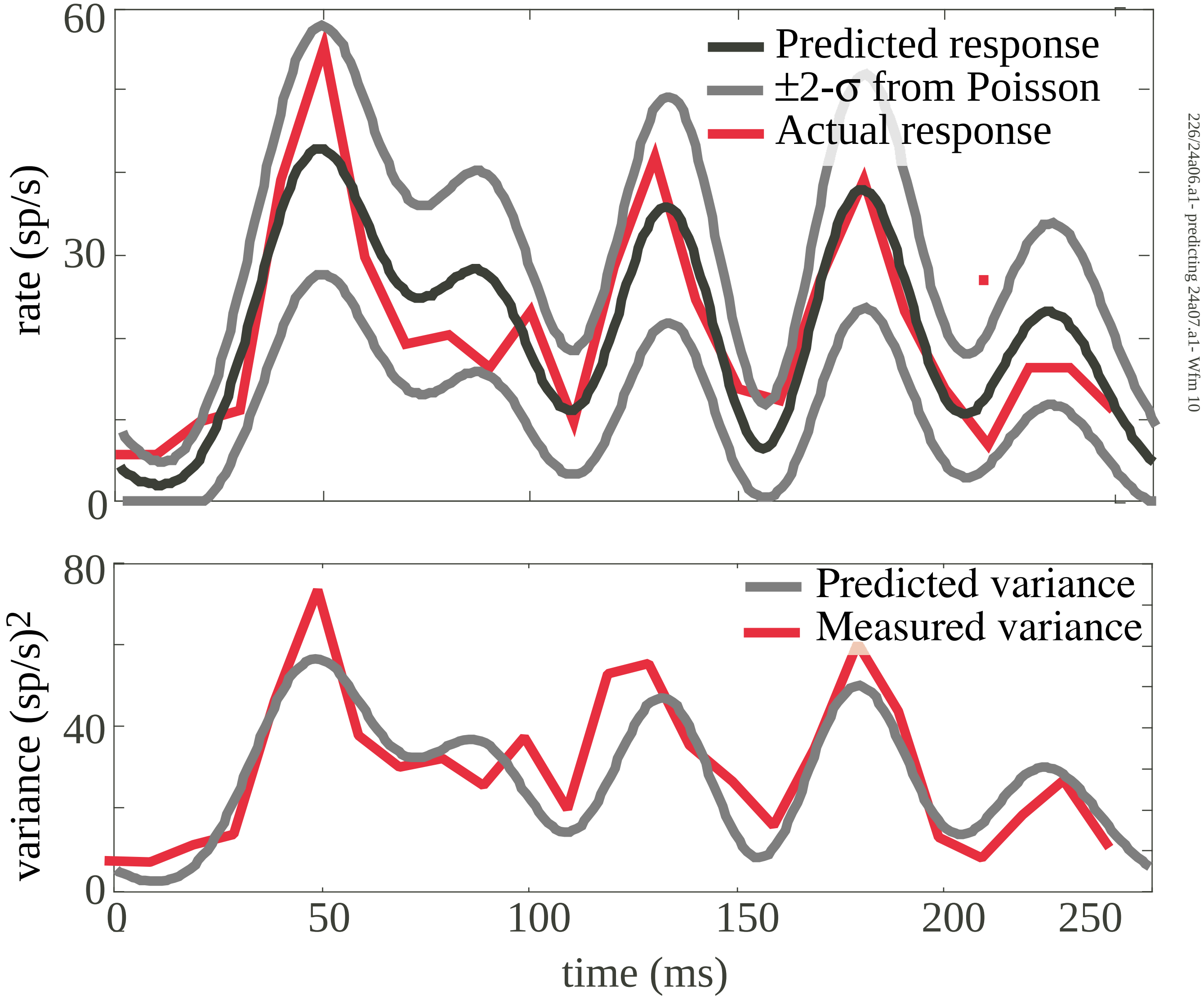
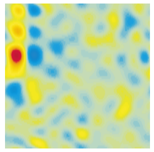
# Examples Continued

- The actual response lies nicely within the variability predicted by Poisson noise.

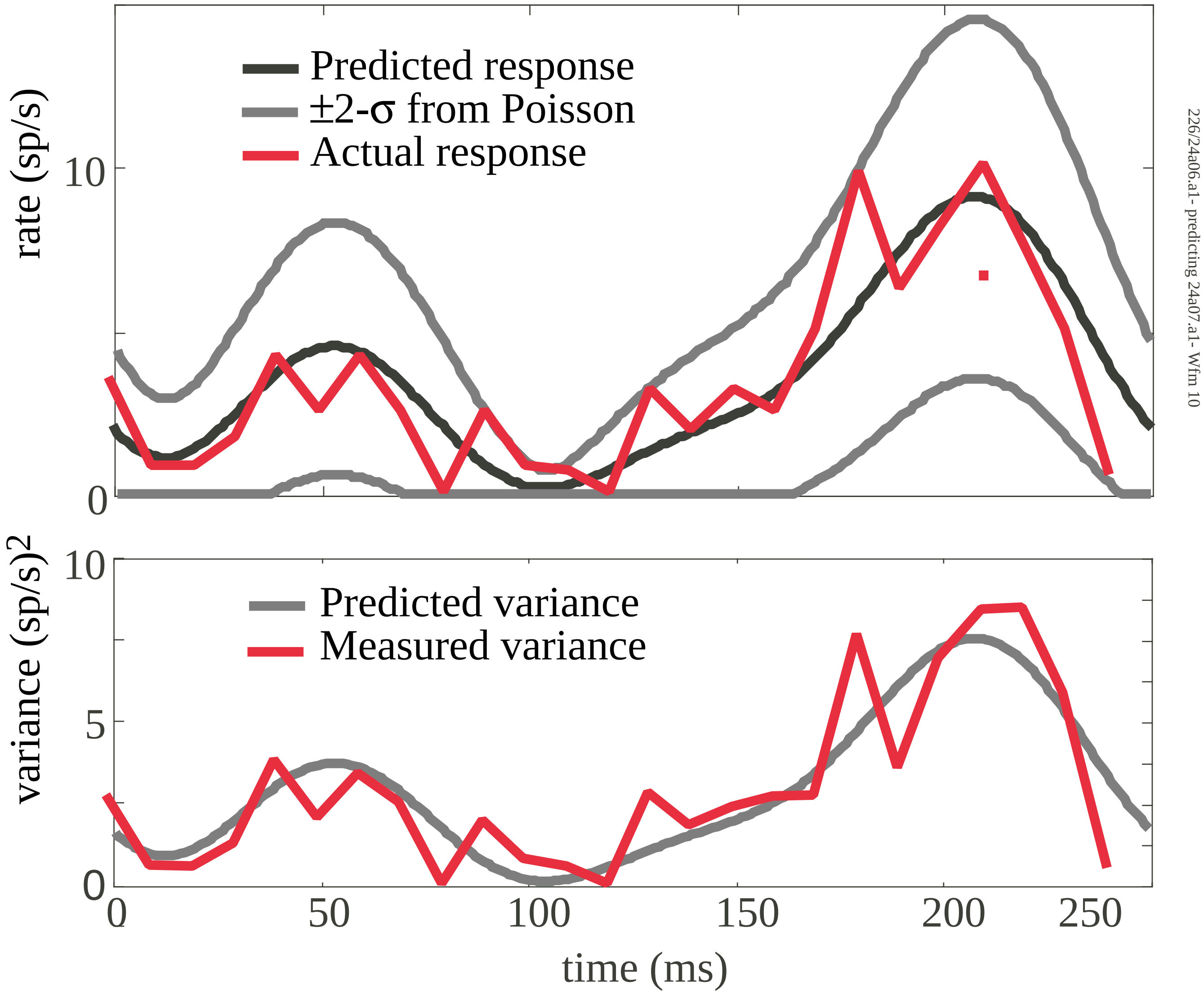
- The variance in the measured response corresponds nicely to the predicted variance.

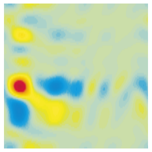


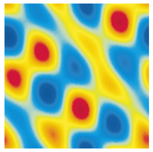



# Predictions with Variability

- The actual response lies nicely within the variability predicted by Poisson noise.
- The variance in the measured response corresponds nicely to the predicted variance.





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# Signal to Noise Theory

- Define observed firing rate: $\boldsymbol{R(t;\Delta t) = (1/n)\, N(t,\Delta t)/\Delta t}$
- $\boldsymbol{\eta_R(t,\Delta t) := E\{R(t;\Delta t)\} = r(t)}$

  $\boldsymbol{\sigma_R^2(t;\Delta t) := E\{[R(t;\Delta t)]^2\} - [\eta_R(t;\Delta t)]^2 = r(t)/(n\, \Delta t)}$
- Signal & Variance ("Noise") Power:

$$\boldsymbol{P := \sum_t [r(t)]^2 \qquad P_\sigma := \sum_t \sigma_R^2(t;\Delta t)}$$

- Signal to Noise Ratio:

$$\mathbf{SNR} := \boldsymbol{P/P_\sigma = n\, \Delta t \left(\sum_t [r(t)]^2\right) / \left(\sum_t r(t)\right)}$$

- SNR grows with rate
- SNR proportional to number of repetitions (more general than Poisson).

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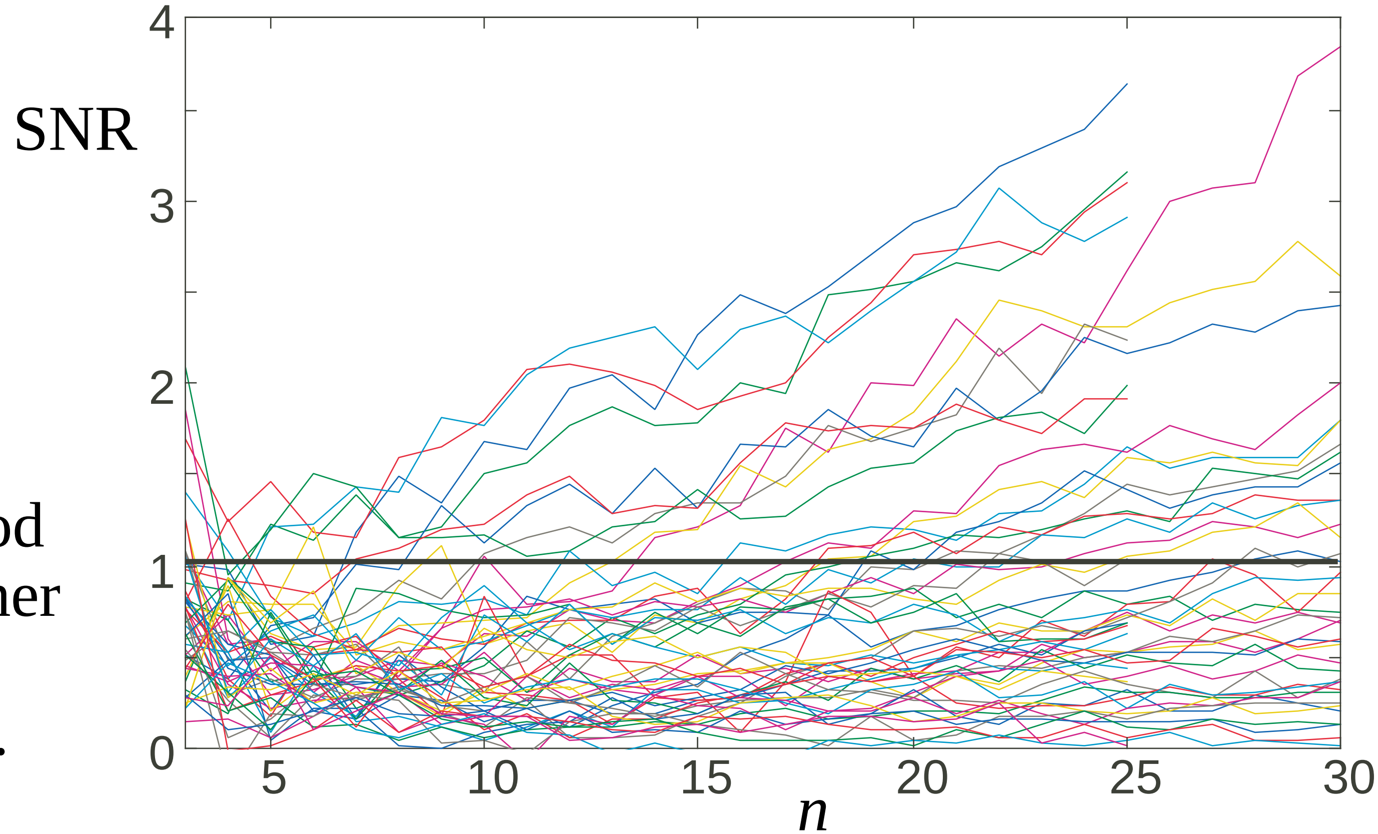
# Signal to Noise in Practice

- Variability analysis distinguishes high SNR ( > 1) from low SNR
- SNR for good cells increased (linear with steep slope) with # of sweeps *n*.
- SNR for linear component of good cells is much higher than that for non-linear component.

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# Increasing the SNR

- Frequency domain:
  - $\boldsymbol{\Pi_\sigma(\omega)} = \mathcal{F}\{\boldsymbol{P_\sigma(t)}\}$ is constant for all $\boldsymbol{\omega}$.
  - In practice, $\boldsymbol{\Pi(\omega)} = \mathcal{F}\{\boldsymbol{P(t)}\}$ is band-limited, so

$$\sum^{\infty} \Pi(\omega) = \sum^{\omega^{crit}} \Pi(\omega).$$

  - We can increase the SNR by using

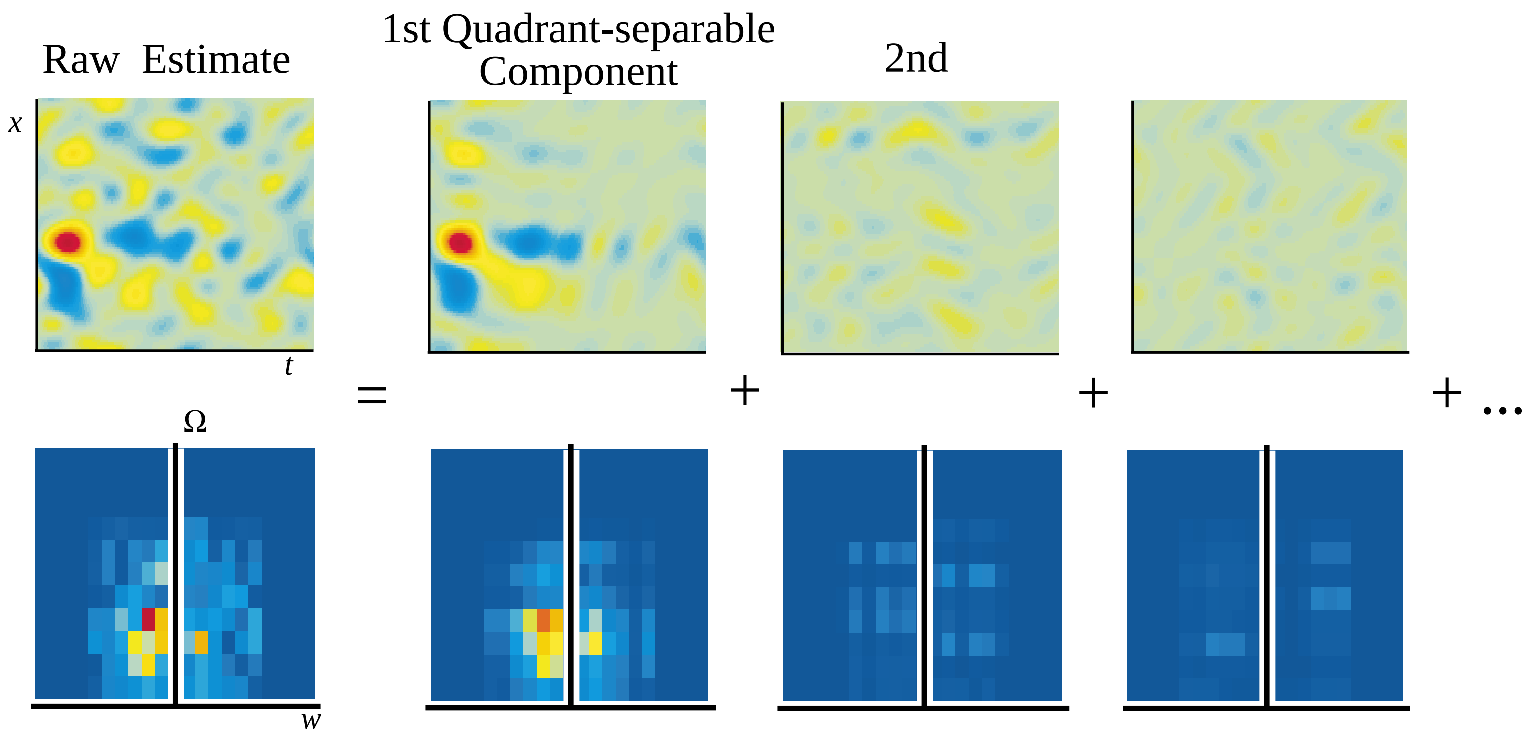
$$\mathbf{SNR}^{incr} := P^{incr}/P_\sigma^{incr} = \left(\sum^{\omega^{crit}} \Pi(\omega)\right) / \left(\sum^{\omega^{crit}} \Pi_\sigma(\omega)\right)$$

  - This is done implicitly by binning or, when deriving the STRF, using low-passed frequency envelopes.

# Singular Value Decomposition

- Singular Value Decomposition (SVD) can be used to estimate the rank of a matrix corrupted by noise. It decomposes the matrix into a sum of rank one matrices, ordered by magnitude. The first *k* components sum to a matrix of rank *k* which minimizes the power of the remaining components.

- We apply SVD to each quadrant of the transfer function. Below, an STRF and the three most significant quadrant-separable components, derived from SVD, are shown.

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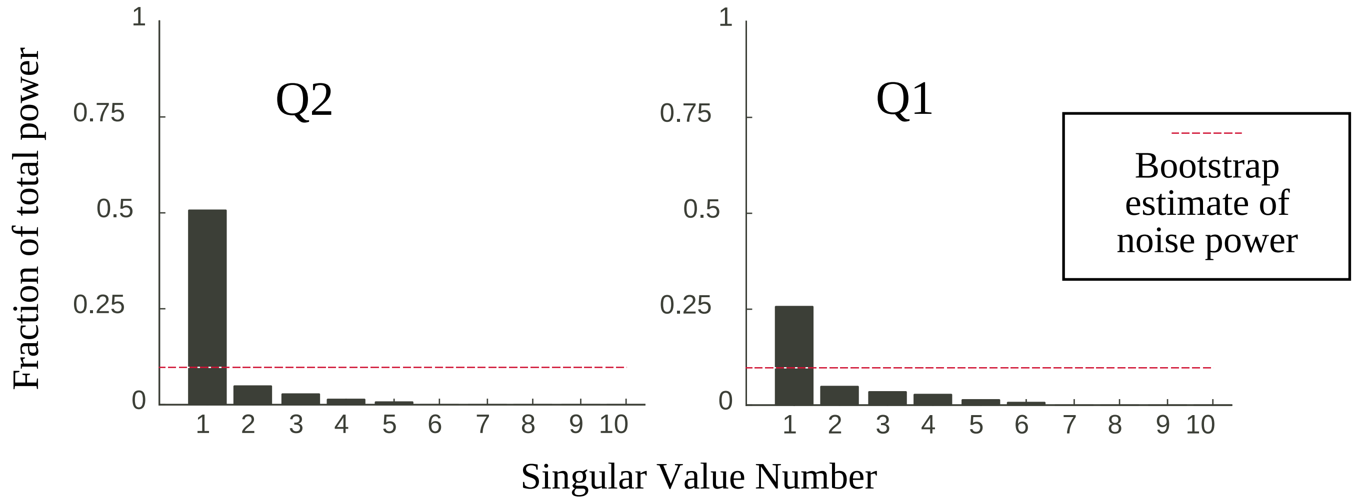
# Singular Value Decomposition Example




- SVD naturally picks out high SNR components of a matrix.
- Large jumps in the singular values.
- Jumps straddle bootstrap estimate of noise.
- Noise can be removed by discarding lower-magnitude components.

# Selected References


**Spectro-Temporal Correlation Methods**

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**Poisson models, Fano factors, information theory and all that**

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